

CIA Director Seeks to Block Calls to Punish Aides Who Overlooked Espionage Case

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CIA Director R. James Woolsey moved yesterday to head off growing congressional demands for swift administrative punishment of CIA officials who overlooked what may be the worst case of espionage in U.S. history.

In announcing the start of three internal probes to review how alleged spying by CIA official Aldrich H. Ames went unchecked for at least nine years, Woolsey deferred any judgment on what to do about those who supervised or inspected Ames's work at the agency from 1985 until he became a suspect last year.

Among those said by congressional sources to be in the lawmakers' sights are personnel in the CIA's Office of Security, which is responsible for helping ferret out spies among the agency's employees but has scored few successes.

Also under scrutiny are officials in the CIA's Directorate of Operations, where Ames worked for most of his career, some of it as a senior counterintelligence official with access to secrets about the agency's sources and spying methods around the globe.

The issue of holding some current CIA officials to account for lax internal security was first raised by members of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence at an occasionally testy, closed session with Woolsey on Wednesday. Chairman Dan Glickman (D-Kan.) and several others told Woolsey they wanted a deferral of any promotions of senior-level personnel pending a completion of the reviews of the Ames case.

Woolsey refused, explaining at the hearing that he was reluctant to decide now whether any actions against individual personnel were appropriate. CIA spokesman Kent Harrington later made clear that Woolsey "would want to see the results of a full inquiry into the case" before deciding on any punitive actions.

Although Glickman said after the hearing that he was "generally satisfied" by Woolsey's remarks, several other lawmakers said the CIA director's responses were too defensive and his proposed internal reviews were too modest a response to the spying debacle.

"Given the seriousness of the situation, [it is] the minimum that might be required, rather than the maximum that might be expected," Rep. Robert G. Torricelli (D-N.J.) said in a prepared statement yesterday. "If the director's intention is to restore confidence within the Congress, I'm still waiting."

Similar criticism was voiced yesterday by

Sen. Dennis DeConcini (D-Ariz.), chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, after a 2½-hour hearing at which Woolsey was peppered with questions about the agency's response to the Ames case.

DeConcini said he was concerned that one of the probes—concerning CIA counterintelligence and security practices—would not be conducted independently of the agency's current management. As outlined by Woolsey, the probe will be staffed largely by CIA officials and conducted partly by one of his closest friends, former national security adviser Brent Scowcroft.

Former defense secretary Harold Brown and former FBI counterintelligence chief W. Douglas Gow will assist in the study. But DeConcini said that with so much CIA staff, Woolsey will be "relying on the same people that may have approved the mistakes that were made."

DeConcini added that Woolsey "will not get what he wants, except it is going to buy him some time. . . . [The review must] get to management problems, and in my judgment that deals with personnel. Who was responsible for permitting it to occur? . . . Those people have got a problem."

Woolsey, who last year turned to some Republican lawmakers in an unsuccessful effort to win approval of an increase in the CIA's budget, got some Republican support yesterday for his probes. Sen. John W. Warner (Va.), the ranking minority member, said he had "high confidence" in Scowcroft and Brown and indicated he was not troubled by the issue of their independence.

Woolsey and other CIA officials said the completion of this internal probe, as well as two others he announced formally yesterday, will be timed so they do not interfere with the prosecution of Ames. That means any personnel action likely will be months away.

In the interim, CIA and congressional officials said, Woolsey may make a few administrative reforms stemming from disclosures that Ames, who married a Colombian citizen in 1985, subsequently was able to amass a substantial fortune and make unauthorized trips overseas without attracting much attention.

They said Woolsey was likely to impose new travel reporting requirements for all CIA employees, seek voluntary disclosures of credit records and perhaps modify CIA regulations regarding marriages between officers and foreigners.